

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Thursday, July 3, 2014

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July 14: [Educator-evaluation data](#) due
July 15: [Housing aid](#) forms due
July 18: [UCOA](#) preliminary data due
July 18: [Physical-restraint](#) report due
September 30: [UCOA FY 2014](#) data due

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Rhode Islanders to continue working to prepare all students for success

Following Governor Chafee's decision to let the legislation on assessments and graduation eligibility pass into law without his signature, I explained in several media interviews that this action represents an adjustment but does not alter our course as we prepare all of our students for success. This legislation provides our students and teachers with another two years at least to

continue the transition to the Common Core State Standards and to standardized assessments aligned with the Common Core. I have also consistently emphasized in media interviews that I am proud that you, your teams, and your communities have stepped up to provide students with additional instruction, support, and resources. I consider it a tremendous success that, this year, thousands of high-school students raised their achievement level in mathematics, and I know that all of us will continue to devote our efforts to improving student achievement and preparing our graduates for success.

I released this statement to the media:

Student readiness for college, careers, and life remains our highest priority, and we will continue working with our school districts to prepare all students for success.

Based on regulations put in place in 2008, we expected students in the Class of 2014 to attain the level of at least partial proficiency or show significant improvement on state assessments in order to be eligible to earn a diploma. As a result, students, families, teachers, and community members stepped up to ensure that our students received additional support to improve their skills, particularly in mathematics. Because of that effort, more than 2,000 students significantly improved their performance in mathematics and at least 95 percent of all high-school seniors met the state-assessment graduation requirement.

Given the change in law, we will continue working with school leaders and teachers to make sure students still receive the support they need to improve their achievement

levels and to be ready for success in college and in challenging careers.

During the many public discussions of our Diploma System, every voice raised called for high expectations and extra supports for our students. We all agree on this point. This legislation states that Rhode Island shall use standardized assessments “to promote school improvement and to target remediation programs to individual students and groups of students.” We will remain constant in our commitment to setting high expectations for students and to providing students with the instruction, support, and resources they need to meet these expectations.

2. Rhode Island to phase out NECAP assessments in mathematics, reading

As a result of the postponement in the use of standardized assessments as a component in the Rhode Island Diploma System, there will be no need to administer NECAP assessments in mathematics and reading next year at any grade level. All students in tested grades and subject areas will participate in PARCC assessments during the coming school year.

The trial run of PARCC assessments this spring went smoothly in Rhode Island and in all other PARCC states, and I appreciate the work you and your team have done to administer PARCC field tests. We anticipate successful implementation of PARCC assessments in literacy and mathematics next year, with about 75 percent of our students taking the assessments on a computer, laptop, or tablet.

PARCC assessments are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, and PARCC assessments emphasize the skills of problem-solving, comprehending texts in fiction and nonfiction, and expressing ideas in writing. As the law specifies, we will use PARCC assessments “to promote school improvement and to target remediation programs to individual students and groups of students.” Over time, we will transition to using PARCC assessments as part of the Diploma System and as a component of educator evaluations.

3. Six Rhode Island high-school students win silver medals in national career-technical education competition

Last week at the [SkillsUSA](#) National Leadership and Skills Conference, held in Kansas City, six Rhode Island students in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs won National Silver Medals in occupational and leadership skills competitions. The silver-medal winners from Rhode Island are:

Alexander Bodo, Mark Coppa, and Shelby St. Clair, from the Chariho Career and Technical Center, in the Crime Scene Investigation competition; and

Erin Blake, Olivia Braga, Autumn Cardente, and Kobe Pereira, from the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center, in the Health Occupations Knowledge competition.

In addition, the Warwick Area Career and Technical Center had five students who placed in the top ten nationally in their competitions, the William M. Davies, Jr. Career and Technical High School had four students placing in the top ten, and the Providence Career and Technical Academy placed two students in the top ten.

Congratulations to all 82 Rhode Island CTE students who participated in this national conference and competition!

From RIDE

Legal:

4. RIDE posts order, decision on kindergarten eligibility, alleged incident of bullying

RIDE has posted a Commissioner's Order on age eligibility for kindergarten enrollment and a Commissioner's Decision on an alleged incident of bullying:

Kindergarten eligibility

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/006-14 N. DOE v. N. Smithfield Order of Dismissal 062014.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/006-14_N._DOE_v._N._Smithfield_Order_of_Dismissal_062014.pdf)

Abuse, racism, and bullying

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/008-14 Student M. Doe v %20Lincoln S.C. 062314.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/008-14_Student_M._Doe_v._%20Lincoln_S.C._062314.pdf)

School Construction:

5. School-construction moratorium extended to next May 1

With passage of the Fiscal Year 2015 budget, the moratorium on school-construction projects was officially extended until May 1, 2015. During the moratorium, only projects necessary for immediate health and safety matters can be approved by the Board of Education. Although some of the projects currently being contemplated may be eligible housing-aid reimbursement, projects that include property purchase, energy upgrades, new construction, or additions cannot be considered for approval. The School Construction Program will work with your LEA and with your design professionals to review any proposed scope of work and to ensure that proposed projects address health and safety needs and are eligible for reimbursement. Please note that you will be required to submit Immediate Health and Safety certification forms, signed by you and by the design professionals, as part of your application for project approval.

We look forward to continued collaboration in ensuring that our schools are safe and healthy learning environments for students and for staff members. Please feel free to contact Joe da Silva (Joseph.DaSilva@ride.ri.gov or 222-4294), Manuel Cordero (Manuel.Cordero@ride.ri.gov or 222-4276), or Mario Carreno (Mario.Carreno@ride.r.gov or 222-8030), in our Office of Statewide Efficiencies, if you have any questions about school construction or if we can assist you in moving forward with construction projects.

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. School districts urged to develop policies, programs to help school counselors work more effectively

Please see this letter on school counselors from Education Secretary Arne Duncan:

As educators across the country work to empower all students to meet the academic and career preparation demands of the 21st century, the role of school counselors has never been more important. School counselors are often the vital link between students' aspirations for the future and tangible opportunities for postsecondary success. They are also particularly important for our neediest students, who require expert and accessible guidance as they navigate a challenging and complicated college admissions and career preparation landscape. As state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) prepare for the start of the 2014–15 school year, I want to call attention to the urgent need for highly effective school counselors and discuss the importance of amplifying the impact of school counselors on students' academic success, social-emotional well-being, and college and career readiness.

If the nation is to meet President Obama's goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020, it is imperative that all students have consistent access to school counselors who possess the training and skills to help students reach their highest aspirations. School counselors are pivotal in helping students manage their academic programs as well as the inevitable life events that may threaten students' ability to succeed in school. Yet, as the Civil Rights Data Collection recently found, one in five American high schools operates without any school counselors on staff (<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2014/03/five-new-facts-from-the-civil-rights-data-collection/>). This is an untenable situation for millions of students who need the

support of site-based school counselors, whose job it is to ensure their students' success.

Schools that do employ counselors may not use them to full advantage. Despite the critical role school counselors play in supporting students' college and career readiness, they often are asked to perform many "non-counseling" duties that can distract from their core work and ultimately leave students without the individualized attention they need to complete their academic course work, successfully navigate the college admissions and financial aid processes, and/or prepare for productive careers. Increasing the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and careers requires that all students benefit from a holistic support system that ensures consistent access to effective school counselors.

Schools and LEAs should support their school counselors by providing them with the time, space, and resources they need to work effectively on behalf of students, while also holding them accountable for measurably improving the college and career readiness of the students they serve. Doing this well will require that SEAs and LEAs make wise investments in professional development for school counselors, create or provide data platforms that can enable school counselors to extend their impact and reach all students, and provide high-quality training for principals and teachers so they understand how to most appropriately utilize and build on the capacities of school counselors.

Additionally, schools and LEAs can further support student success by engaging school counselors in a leadership capacity to serve as trainers and providers of professional

development designed to improve all educators' understanding of the college awareness, admissions, and financial aid processes. This strategy could help school counselors focus their energies on meeting students' academic, social-emotional, and college- and career-readiness needs, especially those of the many first-generation college-bound students who are now graduating from our high schools. ...

Decades of professional experience confirm—and an emerging body of research indicates—that school counselors play a critical role in helping to ensure that our nation's students graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Without the support of school counselors, millions of students would neither graduate from high school nor fulfill the essential requirements of the college admissions and financial aid processes. I urge SEAs and LEAs to use the summer months to strategize and develop policies and programs that enable school counselors to become more effective at helping greater numbers of students—especially low-income students, minority students, students with disabilities, and English learners—successfully access postsecondary education or career opportunities.

I am grateful to you and our nation's school counselors, who strive to meet the varied and complex needs of students and their families.

From other federal departments

- 7. Period of deferred action on some deportations expires in September; eligible residents asked to renew authorization**

Please see this notice from the Office of Homeland Security and please share this information with those in your schools and your community who might be affected by this deadline:

On June 15, 2012, the Secretary of Homeland Security announced that certain people who came to the United States as children and meet several guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years, subject to renewal. They are also eligible for work authorization. Deferred action is a use of prosecutorial discretion to defer removal action against an individual for a certain period of time. Deferred action does not provide lawful status.

This two-year period of deferred action for childhood arrivals is set to expire in September. The U.S. Citizens and Immigration Service is actively preparing for the deferred-action renewal process so that individuals who merit prosecutorial discretion can request and receive a renewal of their deferred action. Those who fail to renew their deferred-action and employment authorization will no longer be considered to be lawfully present in the United States.

Public-education resources on deferred action for childhood arrivals are available at www.uscis.gov/childhoodarrivals.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>